

Article

“Growing up on the Streets”

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St James the Less Penicuik

A Scottish Episcopal Church

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Outreach is now produced as a series of articles posted on the website of St James the Less Church. When there are enough articles, they will be compiled into a magazine which will be printed in limited numbers for those with no internet access. Your feedback and ideas for articles are welcome.

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OUTREACH

Growing up on the Streets

Janine Hunter Hall lives in Dundee. She frequently visits her parents (Marian and Bernie Hunter) in Penicuik, where Janine grew up..

Since January 2013 I have been working at the University of Dundee on **Growing up on the Streets**, a research project which involves 200 street children



Research with and for young people on the streets

and youth living on the streets of three African cities, as researchers into their own lives. **Growing up on the Streets** is a collaboration with UK charity StreetInvest, and local charities in the three project cities: Accra, Ghana; Bukavu, in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo; and Harare, Zimbabwe. It aims to bridge the gap between legislation and political attitudes, and represent street children's lived realities. With over 2,600 interviews and focus groups, it forms the largest ever database of the lives of young street people.

The project has influenced national and international policies, most notably when the entire network contributed to follow up legislation in 2017 to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. It was the first time in the UN's history that children and youth were directly consulted about legislation affecting them.

Thanks to these impacts, we won the University of Dundee's Stephen Fry Award (Stephen Fry is a former Rector of the University) and used the prize money to make a 'story map' - an online visual showcase of the project. In May 2017 I travelled to Accra, Ghana with three tablet computers and 11 street youth (project research assistants or participants). We went into the streets and informal settlements of Accra and recorded photos and videos that represent their life story.

The story map is like a web site - you can scroll down and read or watch the short films, moving between the 10 chapters using buttons at the side. Please have a look if you can - it's called *Growing up on the Streets: A Story Map by Accra's Street Youth* and is freely available online: <https://arcg.is/OL8PSm>. My favourite chapters are Keeping Safe in the City (great train video!) and Making a Living, where you can see what happens to second-hand jeans shipped from 'Europe'.



The Accra 'Story Mappers'.

Working on this project continues to be a fascinating and moving experience for me personally. I am still reading and 'coding' the data (using a specialised computer programme), as well as writing briefing papers with my colleagues; the project's two Research Directors and the Project Managers in the three cities. I have been lucky enough to visit Accra and Harare twice and Bukavu once, met all the research assistants and many of the participants.



This photo was taken when I visited Bukavu, DRC in May 2016 by PhD student Eva Krah, who has been studying the spirituality of street children and youth. Bukavu is a beautiful city, on the shores of Lake Kivu, near the border with Rwanda. It is home to over two million people, and informal settlements now spread up the surrounding hillsides as people flock to the city, fleeing sporadic violence and poverty in the countryside around. The number of children living alone on the streets has also grown.

The project's charity partner there is PEDER, (Programme d'Encadrement des Enfants de la Rue, which translates as Street Children's Mentoring Programme), who work with young people to provide accommodation, education, food, and reunification with families (where this is possible). They have three centres for accommodation and training and are chronically under-funded; they had recently closed their sewing workshops at one centre when I visited, but still have busy joinery and mechanics workshops at another. The street workers go out on to the streets day and night and are well known by young people sleeping on the street. They are almost the only adults who ever treat them with kindness and respect.

Please keep in your hearts, minds and prayers: four participants who have sadly died during the course of the research; participants and street children anywhere who are held in prison or police detention; the late and much missed Father Patrick Shanahan (founder of this project and StreetInvest), who spent many years working with street children and campaigning for their rights; and all homeless or displaced children world-wide.

Finally, to end with a participant's words:

“We, the people who live on the street, our rights are not respected. We claim our rights to the authorities; they neglect, drive us away and call us ‘animals’; they say we deserve to be imprisoned because we are the people who sleep on streets. We wish we were given freedom to move and run our business in the future; we want to behave in the way that people will respect us, they will not close the doors of their houses when they see us, fearing we will steal from them. We want to live and behave like the other people do who have dignity; they should know that we are not animals; we are human beings as they are. They are not superhuman or special; we have the same feelings as them. Living on the street does not mean that we cannot have rights.” (Bukavu, DRC Rights Focus Group 3, February 2016)

Further Info:

- **Briefing Papers** (12 so far, in English and French) <http://www.streetinvest.org/guots-briefing-papers>
- **Knowledge Exchange Training Pack** <http://www.streetinvest.org/guots-knowledge-exchange>
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